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ABSTRACT

Ninety percent of trainees at a counseling center at a large eastern university were administered a 24-item questionnaire in the spring of 1987 to determine their feelings about assessment, supervision, and administrative procedures at the center. The subject pool included 37 persons. Questionnaires were completed anonymously. The majority of the trainees (72%) were working on doctorates, 55% in counseling psychology, and 17% in clinical psychology. The remaining 28% of the respondents were masters students in community counseling and counseling and personnel services. The great majority of trainees (94%) were carrying between two and three client hours per week. Overall, the trainees reported being quite satisfied with the administrative procedures at the center as well as the supervision they received. Physical space limitations constituted an area of dissatisfaction among the trainees. Most trainees indicated that they wanted more training in assessment techniques. (TJH)

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UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER TRAINEES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TRAINING EXPERIENCE

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Shelly M. Ossana

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Summary

Ninety percent of counseling center trainees (N = 38) at a large eastern university were administered a questionnaire in the spring of 1987 regarding their feelings about assessment, supervision, and administrative procedures at the center. Response cards for follow-up purposes were included so that the questionnaire could be completed anonymously. The majority (72%) were working on Ph.D.'s--55% in counseling psychology and 17% in clinical psychology. The remaining 28% of respondees were masters students in community counseling and counseling and personnel services. The great majority of trainees (94%) were carrying between two and three client hours per week.

Overall, the trainees reported being quite satisfied with the administrative procedures at the center as well as the supervision they received. Physical space limitations was one area where trainees were less satisfied. Most trainees indicated that they wanted more training in assessment techniques.

UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER TRAINEES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TRAINING EXPERIENCE

Supervision plays an important role in the development of competent counselors and professional psychologists (American Psychological Association, 1980; Bartlett, Goodyear, & Bradley, 1983, Brown & Lent, 1984; Leddick & Dye, 1987). Although supervision has been the focus of theoretical attention for a number of years (e.g., Hogan, 1964, Loganhill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982), empirical studies of what trainees expect and need from training, in general, and supervision, in particular, have been relatively uncommon until recently (e.g., Leddick & Dye, Martin & McBride, 1987; Miars et al., 1983; Reising & Daniels, 1983). More data are needed to accurately document trainee perceptions of supervision.

Similarly, counselor training--particularly with regard to assessment--has only begun to generate professional attention in the recent past. Assessment, as used here, refers to the evaluation of client functioning in personal/social and/or educational/vocational realms through the use of established psychodiagnostic instruments. In an annual survey of counseling psychology training programs, Richardson and Massey (1986) found that, as indicated by training directors, students were highly interested in courses in clinical assessment, compared to low interest in courses in

rehabilitation counseling, environmental intervention, and program development and administration. King and Seymour (1982) note that "psychopathology [more likely to require the use of remedial skills, such as assessment and diagnosis] is 'in' today--no relation to 'old-fashioned' personal adjustment counseling for the normal problems of normal people" (p. 841). Some have proposed that training programs for counselors should change with the times and place more emphasis on remedial skills, such as clinical assessment and diagnosis (Watkins, 1987); others decry this course of action and advocate a continued emphasis on traditional areas, such as developmental interventions (Drum, 1987). How do trainees feel about their assessment training and experience? This question has not been attended to in the literature, particularly when considering personal/social assessment and educational/vocational assessment separately.

The purpose of the current investigation was to assess attitudes of trainees at a large eastern university counseling center toward three components of their training experiences: supervision, assessment, and administrative issues. The third variable was added in order to document whether the center's administrative procedures helped to provide a supportive environment for trainees.

Method

Trainees

Of the 37 trainees who participated, 64% were females; 36% were males. Eighty-four percent were White; 8% were Black; 5% were Hispanic; and 3% were Asian-American. The majority of trainees were doctoral students, most in counseling psychology. In all, 72% were working on Ph.D's - 55% in counseling psychology and 17% in clinical psychology. The remaining 28% of respondees were masters students in community counseling (14% - including one trainee who had just graduated) or counseling and personnel services (14%). For the largest number of trainees (60%) this was their first or second semester as a trainee at the counseling center. In terms of caseload, 54% of the trainees were seeing at least one client with emotional/social concerns; 35% were seeing at least one client with educational/vocational concerns; and 22% were seeing at least one client with both emotional/social and educational/vocational concerns. The great majority of trainees (94%) were carrying between two and three client hours per week, and nearly all (95%) reported being able to conceptualize clients using one or more theoretical orientations.

Procedure

After informal interviews with various trainees at a university counseling center, a twenty-four item questionnaire was developed as an expanded version of a brief evaluation form completed annually by all practicum students

at the counseling center. Two open-ended items as well as questions about administrative procedures were retained, in similar format, on the new questionnaire. In addition to a new item about the center's space resources for trainees, two other areas were expanded upon in the new questionnaires a result of the informal interviews: (a) assessment, and (b) supervision. During the last three weeks of the semester, trainees (including some of those who had been interviewed informally, initially) received the questionnaire, accompanied by a letter explaining its purpose as part of an on-going counseling center evaluation process. Response cards for follow-up purposes were also enclosed so that the questionnaires could completed anonymously. After follow-up, a 90% response rate was obtained. Frequency distributions and correlation matricies were computed for questionnaire items. Significant correlations were reported at $p < .05$.

Results

Results of Evaluation

Supervision. Most trainees expressed satisfaction with the supervision they received at the training site. Eighty-eight percent reported overall satisfaction and 83% believed that their supervisors had been helpful in their professional development. In terms of developing a theoretical orientation, a somewhat smaller group of trainees (but still the majority, 64%) reported that their supervisors

had been helpful.

Assessment. Responses to the assessment items revealed somewhat conflicting results. The largest percentage of trainees believed that they were competent in assessment techniques for emotional/social cases (66%) and educational/vocational cases (54%). Only 11% did not think that they were competent in emotional/social cases, and 31% did not think so for educational/vocational cases. Fifty percent indicated that they had received an adequate amount of assessment training in their didactic coursework, and 27% reported receiving adequate assessment training through other resources. In the informal interviews, many trainees had indicated that they were concerned about their lack of assessment knowlege and skill in the face of a job market they perceived as increasingly requiring assessment expertise. This concern many have been reflected in another questionnaire item, which revealed that 73% agreed or strongly agreed that their academic programs should be doing more to train them in assessment techniques, while 62% thought the counseling center should be doing more to train them in assessment techniques.

Administration. Overall, the trainees expressed a high degree of satisfaction with administrative aspects of their training site. The overwhelming majority (97%) agreed or strongly agreed that the counseling center's policies and

procedures were explained clearly, and nearly all (95%) believed that administrative procedures were well organized at the center. Furthermore, many reported positive perceptions of the center's atmosphere; 84% perceived the professional staff as helpful (14% were neutral) and 100% perceived the support staff as helpful. Trainees expressed less satisfaction with physical resources of the center; 65% stated these resources were adequate for their needs as trainees, while the remaining students were either neutral or disagreed.

Correlations

All correlations reported throughout this section are significant at $p < .05$.

Supervision. Trainees who stated that their supervisors were helpful in developing a theoretical orientation were, in general, more experienced. These trainees had been at the counseling center for a greater number of semesters ($r = .46$) had worked with a larger number of supervisors ($r = .44$) were more likely to be seeing clients with both educational/vocational and emotional/social problems ($r = .86$) and were futher along in their academic programs ($p = .40$). Furthermore, related to assessment, these trainees were more likely to know ($r = .48$) and have used ($r = .39$) the center's testing resources.

The degree to which trainees reported their supervisors

as being helpful in their professional identity development (e.g., counseling style, conceptualization of clients) correlated with the number of different supervisors with whom the trainees had worked (r = .41). Trainees who felt supported in this way also reported higher competence in educational/vocational assessment (r = .33) and stated that their supervisors had been helpful in applying assessment knowledge to clients (r = .46). Seeing clients with educational/vocational problems (r = .65) and clients with both educational/vocational and emotional/social problems (r = .66) were related to trainees feeling supported by their supervisors in professional identity development, as well. When rating overall satisfaction with supervision received at the center, trainees who reported that their supervisors had helped them apply assessment knowledge to clients also reported high levels of satisfaction (r = .40). Furthermore, these trainees were, again, more experienced. They had typically been trainees at the center for a longer period of time (r = .46), had worked with a greater number of supervisors (r = .30), and were futher along in their academic programs (r = .35). These trainees were also working with more clients who had both educational/vocational and emotional/social problems (r = .69).

Assessment. Feeling competent in assessment techniques appears to be related to a number of variables. Trainees who

reported higher levels of educational/vocational assessment competence were more likely to have had supervisors who helped them apply assessment knowledge to clients (r = .48) and yet also believed that the center should be doing more to train them in assessment techniques (r = .35). Those who reported higher levels of competence in emotional/social assessment stated that they had received adequate assessment training in their academic departments (r = .39).

Knowing and using the center's testing resources correlated with several other variables. Trainees whose supervisors helped them apply assessment knowledge to clients were more likely to know (r = .35) and use (r = .44) testing resources. Those who said they knew the center's testing resources more often reported feeling competent in educational/vocational assessment (r = .77) and as having actually used these testing resources with clients (r = .76). They were more likely to believe that they had received adequate assessment training in their academic departments and believe that the center should be doing more to train them in assessment techniques. Typically, these trainees were seeing more clients with educational/vocational concerns (r = .58). Those who reported using the center's testing resources with clients also reported feeling more competent in educational/vocational assessment (r = .76). These trainees were more likely to have worked with a larger number

of supervisors (r = .29) and believe that both the center (r = .37) and their academic programs (r = .33) should be doing more to train them in assessment techniques.

Discussion

A number of results shown here are interesting in light of previous research. Consistent with previous research (Heppner & Handley, 1981), trainees in this study reported being satisfied with the supervision they received at the center. However, Heppner and Handley also found that although trainees were satisfied with supervision, they were only "slightly influenced" (p. 439) by their supervisors. In contrast to results of the current investigation, trainees in Heppner and Handley's study did not agree that their supervisors had been influential in their development as counselors or as young professionals. The key to this difference may be experience level of trainees; Heppner and Handley's sample consisted entirely of trainees enrolled in beginning practica, whereas the present sample consisted of a range of trainees--from those who were in their first semester of training at the counseling center to those who had a number of semesters of experience there.

The current results indicate that trainee experience may be related to several aspects of supervision. More experienced trainees reported that their supervisiors were helpful in developing a theoretical orientation and an

identity as a professional. This finding may support theoretical models (e.g., Hogan, 1964; Sansbury, 1982; Stoltenberg, 1981) and empirical studies of counselor development and supervision (e.g., Heppner & Roehlke, 1984; Rabinowitz, Heppner, & Roehlke, 1986) which have suggested that a supervisory emphasis on conceptualization and professional identity development becomes increasingly apporpriate as trainees gain experience. Thus, the reported helpfulness of these interventions may reflect their greater relevance for more experienced trainees.

In addition to theoretical orientation and professional identity development, trainee experience was also related to some aspects of assessment supervision. Trainees with more experience rated their supervisiors as helpful in applying assessment knowledge. This finding may also reflect the types of supervisor interventions hypothesized to be most helpful for trainees at different experience levels. Beginning trainees are hypothesized to want structure and direction from their supervisiors (Kaplan, 1983; Worthington & Roehlke, 1979) and to be working on developing basic counseling skills (Sansbury, 1982). Thus, supervisory assistance in the application of assessment techniques may have been of less relevance for fledging trainees. Further, supervision of less experienced trainees may not have included assistance with assessment techniques. For

experienced trainees, who were more likely to have used the center's testing resources with clients, supervisory assistance in the application of assessment techniques may have been more relevant and thus rated as more satisfying.

It is important to note that "experience" is described here in terms of experience at the counseling center where the study took place. Counseling experience in other settings was unaccounted for. However, the fact that trainees' year in school was significantly correlated with both number of center clients as well as number of semesters as a trainee at the center may alleviate some concern in this regard. These results indicate that those trainees likely to have more counseling experience, in general (i.e., further along academically), were described as "experienced" in the context of this study (i.e., number of counseling center clients and semesters). The unanswered question relates to differential counseling experience of trainees at the same academic level. In this study, those who entered their graduate programs with extensive counseling backgrounds were not differentiated from less experienced students.

A more complex pattern is evident in trainees reports of assessment competence; results appeared somewhat contradictory, particularly in regard to educational/ vocational assessment. It is unclear why trainees who felt competent in educational/vocational assessment believed their

academic assessment training to be adequate and yet, in contrast to those who felt competent in emotional/social assessment, still wanted more help learning assessment from the counseling center. Given that trainees who felt competent in educational/vocational assessment were also more likely to have used the center's testing resources, it may be that as they gained assessment experience they realized how much they had yet to learn.

Embedded in this finding is a question of who is responsible for training in assessment. Directors of training sites, whose staff and financial resources are often stretched under the best of circumstances, may not agree that it is their reponsibility to train students in assessment techniques. On the other hand, Stone (1986) notes that academic programs are burdened by growing course requirements due to an increasingly complex marketplace, and faculty members may not believe that they can offer further assessment training in the face of other coursework demands. However, students are indicating that they want more assessment training, and this issue must be resolved between academic departments and training sites.

The fact that the large majority of trainees expressed interest in more assessment training through their academic departments corroborates similar results obtained by Richardson and Massey (1986). Trainees are sending a

consistent message to the academic and training gcommunity with regard to their needs in clinical assessment. Drum (1987) may voice the opposition of many to changing counselor training programs by increasing the emphasis on remedial and traditional clinical skills, such as assessment techniques. However, as the future of the profession, students have an important role in defining the training process. By being attentive to their needs, in supervision as well as in assessment, educators and supervisors can help keep training programs relevant and satsifying for students.

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